

ELECTED MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 15 FEBRUARY 2023

1. Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor C Hart, Cabinet Member for Health and Communities (requested written response)

“How many residents have been referred to the Keeping Warm in Winter scheme over recent years, how many of those applications have been approved, how many have been rejected and how many more referrals does the Council forecast to receive?”

Response:

“Thank you for your question Cllr. Fordham and I would have liked to have been able to give you the information requested but I am afraid that we do not have a scheme at DCC called Keeping Warm in Winter, There is a Keep Warm, Keep Well booklet but that is only a booklet offering advice and not grants.”

2. Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor A Dale, Cabinet Member for Education (requested written response)

“How many children have been in receipt of free school meals over the last 5 years?”

Response:

“Between 2017 and 2022 a range of 11,010 to 19,905 children have been in receipt of Free School Meals. These figures obviously do not include Universal Infant Free School Meals which are an entirely separate datapoint.”

3. Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor K Athwal, Cabinet Highways, Assets and Transport (requested written response)

“How people in Derbyshire have lost their lives to suicide and will it commit to working with other agencies to ensure that roads, railways, bridges, and other buildings are better designed with suicide prevention measures actively in place?”

Response:

“Thank you, Cllr Fordham for your question but I think the question is how “many” people? Is that correct?”

In Derbyshire, 87 deaths were recorded from suicide or unknown injuries for 2020, the latest year for which published figures are available. (Source: Primary Care Mortality Database). And yes, we are already working with a number of agencies including The Derbyshire Self-harm and Suicide Prevention Partnership Forum, which is driven by Derbyshire County Council Public Health,

and leads a multi-agency strategic approach to suicide prevention. Much of the focus is about supporting those who may be at a higher risk for suicide.”

4. Question from Councillor E Fordham to Councillor C Hart, Cabinet Member for Health and Communities

“Will the Council consider the creation of Drug Consumption Rooms across Derbyshire as a means of harm reduction, for the promotion of conversations between hard to reach drug users and health professionals, and to better protect the public from drug related detritus? And will it note that this approach works in countries such as Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, Canada and has been trialled in Scotland with evidence indicating success.”

Response:

“Thank you, Councillor Fordham, for your question. I am afraid I have to say no to your request that we consider the creation of drug consumption rooms across Derbyshire. The reason is very straightforward. The Home Office have confirmed on numerous occasions there is no legal framework for drug consumption rooms and anyone setting one up and running one could be liable for prosecution so therefore we will not be considering it.”

Supplementary question:

“Thank you. If I may, Councillor Hart, I understand the legal framework. I wonder if there is a way in which we could explore the support in order to achieve harm reduction?”

I recently went back to see school friends in Boston in Lincolnshire. There if you go into the Parish Church in the toilets are legal disposal points in the toilets themselves. I have only see this once in Derbyshire and that is in the closed public toilets in Staveley marketplace but it seems to me there are measures we can take that need not push the boundaries of drug consumption rooms but do provide for minimalising harm reduction and for reaching drug users and health professionals and enabling a dialogue to take place.

I hear what you say in relation to drug consumption rooms and the legal framework but I wonder if there are measures we can take to better assist those who are in need of our help?”

Response:

“Thank you for your supplementary. There is an awful lot of work we do do in combating drugs and alcohol, as I am sure you know. If you want a lot more information rather than taking time up now I am quite willing to go through all the things we do.

As far as the drug consumption rooms actually it has been proved there is evidence it works better in a city rather than Derbyshire as a rural community.

It is all to do with city locations have a high number of homeless, chaotic and transient drug users so it is more beneficial in that, but we do do an awful lot of work. We have just set up a new Drugs and Alcohol Strategy Partnership which has started working together. That is talking about senior officers, senior members and such like.

We have different things we do. I have to say there is the new National Joint Combating Drugs Unit now being set up again and that is also trying to break the drug supply chains; deliver world class treatment recovery and achieve a generation shift in the demand so we are heavily involved in that and this partnership is delivering on that, but we do do a lot of work with partners and we work with pharmacies. We have needle and syringe programmes; Naloxone provision using additional grant funding to identify local needs through an assessment. We are trying to work with the hard-to-reach groups. There is an awful lot of work going on so if you want any more information you can quite willingly call and see me or email me and I will give you a lot more information but there is a lot of good work going on."

5. Question from Councillor N Gourlay to Councillor K Athwal, Cabinet Highways, Assets and Transport (requested written response)

"When will the Council re-open Bamford Clough, a byway within my division?"

Response:

"Thank you Cllr Gourley for your question

The Council has undertaken works to investigate and put in place measures that may lead to Bamford Clough being reopened again in the next few months as a "one way" for a trial 12 month period to measure it's usage."

6. Question from Councillor R George to Councillor N Hoy, Cabinet Member for Adult Care

"What is the current occupancy rate of the County Council's care homes?"

Response:

"Thank you. The current occupancy rate of Derbyshire County Council care homes as of week commencing 6 February was 62.8%."

Supplementary question:

"Yes. Bearing in mind the occupancy rate at this time of the winter when hospitals have been discharging patients at an ever higher rate I just wondered why the County Council's own care homes are not used in preference to the independent sector placements which are set out in the finance report as costing the Council so much money and being a major reason for the forecast £15.6m overspend?"

Response:

"We are working with NHS colleagues across Derbyshire and the health and care system to support hospital discharge and to avoid people being admitted into hospital. There is a reduction in demand because of people wanting to live at home and that is the reality, people want to live at home."

7. Question from Councillor R George to Councillor K Athwal, Cabinet Highways, Assets and Transport

"What is the timescale for repairing the drains on Whitehough Head Road in Chinley?"

Response:

"Thank you, Councillor George, for your question. The scheme is now fully designed and has been commissioned for construction services to deliver with a provisional construction start date early this year, early May this year."

8. Question from Councillor G Kinsella to Councillor K Athwal, Cabinet Highways, Assets and Transport (requested written response)

"What data do Highways collect on the percentage of repairs that are carried out 'right first time' and can you share with Members the performance for quarters 2 and 3 of 2022/23 against target? Please be clear, given Cllr Spencer's response at the last Full Council, I accept that not all repairs fall in to this category. However, I expect the council to report on the percentage of repairs that fall in to the category of being completed 'right first time'."

Response:

"Thank you Cllr Kinsella for your question. Where possible, the Highways Service approach is to do a permanent fix first time on road defects.

Whilst we try to avoid re-work to maximise efficiency and reduce costs, there are sometimes good reasons why we cannot do this. This includes weather conditions, traffic volumes and dangerous locations, along with safety of both residents and staff.

Our current asset management system doesn't have the facility to accurately capture data on the number of defects which have had to be re-worked. It is set up to capture data based on individual road lengths which is consistent with national practice. However, I am assured that the proportion of defects requiring re-work is very low compared to the overall number of defects repaired."

9. Question from Councillor K Kinsella to Councillor B Lewis, Cabinet Member for Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change

“The Climate Change Strategy (2021-25), as we have heard earlier includes a target to create 24,000 skilled green jobs in Derbyshire by 2030. How can we measure progress against this? I take the point that Councillor Lewis made earlier about having to use national targets. Nevertheless one of the key issues is:

- We don't have a shared definition of what a 'green job' is so how do we know how or when we have delivered 24,000 green jobs when we don't know what a green job is?;
- We don't know how many green jobs there were in Derbyshire when this target was set and we don't know how many there are now; and
- We don't have any interim targets leading up to 2030 so we have no idea where we are now, where we started from and where we are going to be in 2030?”

Response:

“Thank you very much indeed for your question, Councillor Kinsella. I think I gave a bit of an indication of where I might be going with this a little bit earlier on in response to a public question. I know you are very into your targets and figures and numbers etc so I will do my best to answer your point.

The original target of 24,000 green skilled jobs by 2030 was captured in our Planning Strategy back in 2021 and is based on the Government's Green Jobs Taskforce national target to create 2 million green jobs by 2030. 24,000 was calculated as a local target in proportion to our population here.

In terms of defining a 'green job' there is no single definition available at the moment. Multiple national and international organisations such as the Office for National Statistics, the United Nations' system of environmental accounting and the International Labour Organisation all have different perspectives and suggestions with regard to this. However, the guidance on the Government's Green Jobs Taskforce report helpfully terms a green job as “employment and an activity that directly contributes to, or indirectly supports the achievement of the UK's net zero emissions target and other environmental goals such as nature restoration and mitigation against climate risks” but in the scope of the current Climate Change Strategy, Councillor Kinsella is correct in saying that DCC has not formally adopted this other form of definition of green jobs. That is to be addressed through our work on the proposed Skills and Employment Plan which will form part of our preparations for the Combined Authority. This work will also include a full baseline assessment of economic sectors within the county and will draw out how best to support decarbonisation of existing sectors and how to grow and attract new green industries. This in turn it is hoped will establish what skills and training interventions would best support that economy.

There is an important thing to note here though that the significant progress the Council has made already in delivering interventions to support a new lower carbon economy in Derbyshire, not just attracting new green businesses but greening up our existing job base, interventions such as our £2m Green

Entrepreneur Grant Scheme, I have already talked about expansion for that which is directly funded by the County Council in providing demonstrated funding to local businesses not only to build and create green technology but create truly green jobs within business.

There are more points here. What I can do is package that up into a written answer for you. There are only a couple more points actually but it is along the same sort of themes. It is a situation we are trying to address and get better descriptors for the roles of green jobs within our economy. Thank you very much."

Supplementary question:

"Yes, just to quote the senior manager from the Economic and Regeneration Team in terms of when I asked that question of her about what is a 'green job' she said "We don't have a complete understanding of what a 'green job' is, we are not quite there yet."

The reason why I choose this, I don't want to focus too much on this one particular issue but it just goes to show (and Councillor Lewis is right I am into targets and all that sort of thing), it is called Effective Performance Management, it does puzzle me as to how we can set targets on issues where we don't know the baseline, we don't know the definition and we don't know where we are at this point in time.

I suppose my follow-up question is how can people be expected to hold the Council to account when we have targets such as the one I have just explained which doesn't really make sense?"

Response:

"Thank you. I don't know if the answer to this is how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. It is almost in that sort of scope the broadness of that particular question I was just asked there. I have given a fairly comprehensive answer about how we are trying to address this particular situation. I agree in some senses we do need to better define what 'green jobs' are, where they sit within the economy so that we can upskill those roles to make sure that we are meeting those future demands for things like retrofitting housing for greening out some of the better green spaces if you like in terms of restoration of eco systems, that sort of stuff. There are a lot of things that we need to roll into this and it will take time to get there."